

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /072 W

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R 091601Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7902

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

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AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

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AMCONSUL ANTWERP

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E.O. 11652:N/A

TAGS: PINT, BE

SUBJECT: TINDEMANS GOES TO THE PEOPLE

REF: BRUSSELS 8660

1. FOLLOWING AN ANNOUNCEMENT OF A "WORK TO RULE" ACTION BY DOCTORS, A GENERAL OUTCRY AGAINST THE ECONOMY MEASURES IN EDUCATION, AND FGTEB-CSC STRIKE THREAT TO FORCE RETURN TO THE "UNTAMPERED" COL INDEX (REFTEL), PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS ON SEPTEMBER 7 WENT DIRECTLY TO THE PEOPLE (VIA TV) TO DEFEND GOVERNMENT POSITIONS ON THESE ISSUES AND TO EXPRESS THE HOPE THAT FUTURE DISCUSSIONS AMONG GOVERNMENT, LABOR, AND MANAGEMENT REPRESENTATIVES WOULD TAKE PLACE IN AN ECONOMIC AS WELL AS A SOCIAL FRAMEWORK. APROPOS OF THE WAGE INDEXATION ISSUE, THE PM FOCUSED ON THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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QUESTION OF BELGIUM'S COMPETITIVE POSITION IN FOREIGN

MARKETS, POINTING OUT THAT A MINORITY SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT IN DENMARK HAD LIMITED WAGE INCREASES TO 6 PERCENT; THAT UNIONS IN GERMANY HAD AGREED TO A MAXIMUM INCREASE OF 5.5 PERCENT; AND THAT HOLLAND WOULD REGISTER A 9.3 PERCENT INCREASE FOR 1976-WHILE THE WAGE INCREASE IN BELGIUM WOULD EXCEED 12 PERCENT IN 1976. THE PM WARNED GRAVELY THAT THE SOCIAL PARTNERS FACED AN OPPORTUNITY, "PERHAPS OUR LAST", TO PATCH UP THE SOCIAL COMPACT.

2. THE TRIPARTITE CONFRONTATION WHICH OCCURRED AT THE EMPLOYMENT CONFERENCE ON THE FOLLOWING DAY FEATURED THREE QUESTIONS PUT TO GOVERNMENT BY THE TRADE UNIONS: (1) COULD GOVERNMENT RESTORE OPERATION OF THE COMPLETE INDEX, EFFECTIVE IN SEPTEMBER ? (2) COULD THE INDEX ITSELF BE REVISED? (3) WILL THE WORKERS BE COMPENSATED FOR THEIR LOSSES AS A RESULT OF THE REMOVAL OF CERTAIN ITEMS FROM THE INDEX? THE GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN INDICATED THAT, IN ORDER TO REALIZE THE ANTI-INFLATIONARY BENEFIT, THE ADJUSTED INDEX MUST REMAIN THROUGH SEPTEMBER. GOVERNMENT WOULD, HOWEVER, STUDY THE QUESTIONS FURTHER AND GIVE DEFINITE REPLIES AT THE NEXT MEETING (ON SEPTEMBER 15) OF THE TRIPARTITE GROUP-ONE DAY AFTER THE PREVIOUSLY ANNOUNCED TRADE UNION MEETINGS TO DECIDE ON APPROPRIATE ACTION IN THE EVENT LABOR'S DEMANDS WERE NOT MET. EMPLOYER SPOKESMAN PULINCKX INDICATED FEB'S WILLINGNESS TO DISCUSS THESE ISSUES SEPARATELY WITH THE TRADE UNIONS-BUT PROBABLY NOT BEFORE SEPTEMBER 15.

3. COMMENT: CHANCES FOR A "BELGIAN SOLUTION" ARE GOOD. BRIEF STRIKES AND DEMONSTRATIONS OF THE KIND BEING PLANNED ARE NOT LIKELY TO HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON GOVERNMENT ACTION AND, FROM A PSB VIEWPOINT, ARE RISKY IN PRESENT PRE-ELECTORAL PERIOD. THERE EXISTS, MOREOVER, AMPLE ROOM FOR COMPROMISE-AS SUGGESTED BY UNION POINT REGARDING POSSIBLE FURTHER REVISION OF THE INDEX. SUCH A REVISION, COUPLED WITH SOME SORT OF (TOKEN?) REIMBURSEMENT FOR LOST PURCHASING POWER, COULD BE THE ANSWER. FIRESTONE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REPORTS, POLITICAL SITUATION, ECONOMIC PROGRAMS, PUBLIC ATTITUDES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 09 SEP 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ElyME
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976BRUSSE08789
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760341-0675
From: BRUSSELS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760979/aaaacpkg.tel
Line Count: 99
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 BRUSSELS 8660
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ElyME
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 01 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <01 APR 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <13 AUG 2004 by ElyME>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: TINDEMANS GOES TO THE PEOPLE
TAGS: PINT, BE, (TINDEMANS, LEO)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006